

For Immediate Release

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City, County and Baseball Officials, Business Leaders, Break Ground for City Sportsplex; Home Stadium for Newark Bears To Complement Downtown Growth

Newark, NJ (May 6)... Newark Mayor Sharpe James, Essex County Executive James W. Treffinger and a host of corporate and Atlantic League baseball officials today broke ground for the much heralded \$22 million downtown Sportsplex.

The complex featuring a minor league baseball facility slated as the home stadium for the Newark Bears is sited just north of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center within two blocks of the Erie-Lackawanna train station and close by entrances and exits to Interstate Route 280.

The Sportsplex, designed as a multi-purpose facility capable of hosting baseball, football, soccer and other special events is located on the east side of Broad Street between Division and Bridge Street on an 11-acre site at the northern end of Newark's business district.

In celebrating the beginning of construction for the multi-purpose stadium, officials today announced that Opening Day is planned for May 1999.

Today's ceremonies featured musical presentations by Weequahic High School's Marching Band; the Gondolaires, a barbershop quartet; the Newark Boys Choir singing "America The Beautiful" and a reading of "Casey At The Bat" by Newark High School student Jamil Mangan.

Serving as Master of Ceremonies is Star-ledger and syndicated columnist Jerry Izenberg, a member of the New Jersey State Sports Hall of Fame.

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Those offering remarks or participating in the ceremonial dig at the event were: County Executive James Treffinger; Newark Mayor Sharpe James; Frank Bolten, Commissioner of the Atlantic Baseball League and owner of the Atlantic City Surf; Essex County Freeholder Board President Joseph DiVincenzo; William M. Freeman, president and CEO of Bell Atlantic, Inc.; Donald Bradley, president of the Newark City Council; Thomas Banker, Executive Director of the Essex County Improvement Authority and David Barger, VP-Newark for Continental Airlines and Board Chairman of The Regional Business Partnership.

The ceremonies also featured a photo memorabilia display of the Newark Bears and The Newark Eagles, legendary teams of the 1930's and 1940's.

HOK, Inc, the nation's leading sports architectural firm who designed the award winning Camden Yards in Baltimore, also designed the Newark stadium.

"This vital project is a cornerstone to the revitalization of Newark's downtown, and the new and exciting Bridge Street location ties the stadium to the Broad Street Station, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Penn Station and eventually Newark International Airport via the Newark Rail Link," said County Executive Treffinger, adding, "NJPAC is the next stop after the stadium."

"I am excited about these plans and this new site. This time next year, I expect to be throwing out a baseball for the new, Newark Bears in this gorgeous new, state-of-the-art baseball stadium," said Mayor James while pointing out the stadium will be the northern anchor for Newark's waterfront development project and will be linked via New Jersey's new rail link directly to the airport and all rail lines that serve Newark.

"These wonderful mass transit connections, combined with the stadium's easy access to major highways and strategic location in downtown Newark, create a win, win situation for New Jersey's largest city. It puts us in a league with Cleveland and Baltimore, whose comeback as major American cities has been tied to the development of arts and sports centers," said James.

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"We have now seen the NJ Performing Arts Center change the face of the river front in Newark. The addition of a professional sports complex will complete the revitalization and bring even more families to the downtown area," said Treffinger.

In addition to the proposed facility serving as home to the Newark Bears it will also be the city's entry into the new Atlantic League of Professional Baseball Clubs. Other team sites expected in the league in addition to Newark are Atlantic City and Somerset County in New Jersey, Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, Nashua, New Hampshire and Suffolk County on Long Island.

"This project exemplifies the public/private partnerships that are shaping Newark's future as we move into the next millennium. It will be a beautiful anchor to the northern end of our \$76 million Joseph G. Minish Riverfront Park and provide jobs both during and after the construction process," said Mayor James.

According to Treffinger, "the return of professional baseball to Newark is just another step in the ongoing economic upturn that is taking place all across Essex County and county government is proud to be a partner."

The Mayor said: "I can hardly wait to see the smiles on our young people once again enjoying the kind of excitement I felt as a young boy watching the Newark Bears and Eagles play in Ruppert Stadium. This time, we will have one team, and we will build something we can all be proud of, a facility that will provide affordable family entertainment for the young and old.

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